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GOLD

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1. Dancing Queen 3.49
2. Knowing Me, Knowing You 4.01
3. Take a Chance on Me 4.01
4. Mamma Mia 3.32
5. Lay All Your Love On Me 4.32
6. Super Trouper 4.10
7 I Have A Dream 4.43
8. The Winner Takes It All 4.54
9. Money, Money, Money 3.05
10. S.O.S. 3.19
11 Chiquitita 5.26
12. Fernando 4.10
13. Voulez Vous 4.21
14. Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! 4.46
(A Man After Midnight)
15. Does Your Mother Know 3.14
16. One Of Us 3.53
17 The Name Of The Game 3.56
18. Thank You For The Music 3.51
19. Waterloo 2.42

All songs written by Benny Andersson & Björn Ulvaeus,
except 1,2,10,17, & 19,
written by Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus, & Stig Anderson
All titles produced by Benny Andersson & Björn Ulvaeus
Digitally re - mastered by Michael B. Tretow

1. ℗ 1976 2. ℗ 1977 3. ℗ 1978 4. ℗ 1975 5. ℗ 1980 6. ℗ 1980 7. ℗ 1979 8. ℗ 1980 9. ℗ 1976 10. ℗ 1975
11. ℗ 1979 12. ℗ 1976 13. ℗ 1979 14. ℗ 1979 15. ℗ 1979 16. ℗ 1981 17. ℗ 1977 18. ℗ 1983 19. ℗ 1974
Polar Music International AB

Perhaps mainly due to English being the only universal language of pop and rock, the vast majority of classic modern popular music has been made by either British or American acts, yet one of the most enduring and successful groups of all time came from Sweden, where English is a foreign language. We're talking about Abba, of course, who dominated charts for around eight years, and whose musical heritage remains very familiar despite the passing of time. 'Abba-esque', the EP by Erasure of Abba cover versions which topped the UK chart in 1992, and the very popular 'copy' groups with acts based on Abba's music, are just some indication of the continuing influence of the quartet who were second only to Volvo as Sweden's biggest export earners for several years, and who remain revered and legendary as one of the most accomplished pop/rock groups ever.

Their story was obviously unique – two Swedish rock stars, Björn Ulvaeus, singer and guitarist from The Hootenanny Singers, and his keyboard playing friend Benny Andersson from The Hep Stars (known as "The Swedish Beatles" they even set up Hep House, their equivalent of the ill-fated Apple Corps) formed Abba with Björn 's wife, Agnetha Fältskog, a beautiful blonde in her early twenties, and Benny's girl friend, dark haired siren Anni-Frid 'Frida'Lyngstad, a Norwegian-born singer who fronted her own band and, like Agnetha, had made several big-selling albums in Sweden. They were all managed by a music business entrepreneur named Stig Anderson (unrelated to Benny, their surnames are spelt differently). Benny and Björn wrote good songs together, and in 1972, they recorded one of these compositions which became widely known in America without quite making the chart. The track used Anni-Frid and Agnetha as backing vocalists, and on the strength of its unexpected international appeal, the quartet were invited to submit a song for the Swedish 'Song For Europe' contest. The winner would represent Sweden in the 1973 Eurovision Song Contest, and Abba, as they now called themselves, produced a song with English lyrics which was clearly superior to the other entries, but which the judging panel of so called Swedish musical 'experts' placed only third. So no Eurovision that year, but Stig decided to immediately start planning for the 1974 contest, especially as there had been such an outcry in Sweden about the 'experts' As a result of which, a completely new method of Eurovision selection would be used in future. Abba's song for 1974 was 'Waterloo', which effortlessly wiped out all Swedish opposition and then swept the board at the Eurovision Contest proper in Brighton, England. An upbeat song comparing a romance with Napoleon's defeat at the famous historical battle, it entranced the international jury, especially as the group were backed by an orchestra whose

conductor wore an instantly recognisable Napoleonic hat. Released as a single, 'Waterloo' topped charts around the world, also making the US Top 10, and Abba (a word composed of the initial letters of the quartet's first names) were on their way.

It is regrettably true to say that non-British winners of the Eurovision Song Contest rarely return to the UK charts and a virtual stigma has developed in Britain about non-British Eurovision winners. Quite possibly, Abba were unknowing victims of this negative thinking and immediate follow-up singles were less successful.

In 1975, the quartet returned to the UK Top 10 with 'S.O.S', a song which confirmed their international appeal by topping the charts in countries as disparate as West Germany and Australia, as well as again penetrating the US Top 20. With both the 'Waterloo' and 'Abba' albums selling well enough to make the UK chart, Abba were poised to explode, which is exactly what they did. Between December, 1975, and February, 1978, seven Abba singles were released in Britain, of which six topped the chart and the seventh peaked at Number Three. Not that such remarkable domination ended there, because in the second half of the decade, 13 Abba single releases reached the UK top 5 – that's a hit every 20 weeks on average for a full five years, while five of their albums topped the UK chart. No other act in that period even approached the 35 weeks Abba accumulated at Number One in the album chart, and they successfully outsold every punk rock, New Wave and disco act of the time, although comparatively little was written about them in the press. It wasn't a question of journalists not wanting to praise them, but more that Abba had very little time for the media because if they weren't recording new smash hits, then they were flying all over the world for promotion and personal appearances.

Most of those 13 hits remain instantly recognisable, especially 'Dancing Queen', which Abba performed in 1976 at the wedding reception celebrating the marriage of the King of Sweden to Silvia Sommerlath. Probably their biggest ever single, it not only topped the chart for six weeks in Britain, but also in numerous other countries, including Australia, Germany, Norway, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, New Zealand and most importantly, the USA. All the group's original material, including such familiar chart toppers as 'Mamma Mia' (another German No. I) 'Fernando' (which reached the US Top 20, and topped the charts in countries as far apart as Holland and Australia), 'Knowing Me,Knowing You' (yet another No. 1 in Germany), 'The Name of The Game' and 'Take A Chance On Me', was written and produced by Benny and Björn , although Stig Anderson occasionally lent a hand on the lyrics of a few of these pop classics.

In 1977, just as 'Knowing Me, Knowing

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You' was released to become their fourth UK Number One in 15 months, Abba embarked on their first live concerts in Britain, during which they filled the Royal Albert Hall. These shows gave audiences the chance to hear new material especially written by Benny & Björn for 'The Girl With The Golden Hair', which they described at the time as a 'mini musical' The most significant and popular song from this incomplete project, which sadly has never apparently been finished (largely due to the demands on the group's time as each new hit single soared up the charts all over the world), was 'Thank You For The Music', one of Abba's most popular and familiar songs, which was only released as a single when the group had effectively disbanded. It is often regarded as their farewell to their huge international following – not that anyone was aware at the time that Abba was on the verge of falling apart.

1977 was also the year when the group were the stars of a feature film made in Australia, where they were incredibly popular, 'Abba The Movie' was a story about a journalist who was given the tough assignment of interviewing Abba, which was the equivalent of getting an interview with The Beatles during the Fab Four's hey-day – a difficult task. When it was released in 1978 to immense acclaim from Abba fans everywhere, it accompanied a similarly titled 'Abba - The Album', which inevitably achieved instant platinum status all over the world. 1978 eventually proved to be a watershed year for Abba.

In October of that year, Frida and Benny, who had been living together for several years, finally got married, so that for the first time, Abba was composed of two husband and wife teams. Sadly, this happy state of affairs was brief, because by the end of the year, Agnetha and Björn had separated.

However, the hits continued, and 1979 brought no less than five UK Top 5 singles which reached the charts: 'Chiquitita' became the subject of a notable charitable act. A specially recorded live version of the song was included on an album which can only be called unique : 'The Music For UNICEF Concert' was a star-studded gala hosted by The Bee Gees at the General Assembly Hall of The United Nations in New York. Besides Abba, among the other artists who played live at the event and donated their services free to benefit this very good cause, were Rod Stewart, Kris Kristofferson, Earth Wind & Fire, Donna Summer, and Olivia Newton-John. Each also donated a song to the United Nations Childrens' Fund in perpetuity, and it is believed that the income UNICEF derived from 'Chiquitita' alone amounted to several hundred thousand pounds.

Two of the year's subsequent singles by the quartet, 'Does Your Mother Know' and 'Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!', were typically irresistible Abba smashes, although 'Does

Your Mother Know' slightly deviated from the usual winning formula, featuring lead vocals by Björn , rather by than Agnetha and Frida as normally happened. The other two singles were much more significant deviations; 'Voulez-Vous' was the title track of Abba's 1979 album, which was quite a departure, a much more personal collection in lyrical terms, with several songs about the tribulations of romance from which the group members were suffering. 'I Have A Dream', Abba's final UK single of a decade which they had dominated, also topped the Dutch charts, and was different again as it was a singalong item which was especially recorded live at Wembley Arena, with a large choir of children, at the last concert of what would sadly turn out to be Abba's final tour together as live performers.

However, it wasn't all over, not by a long chalk, as 1980 found Benny and Björn hard at work on songs for the group's next original album 'Super Trouper', which was eventually released at the end of the year. Of course, it instantly topped the UK album chart, a position echoed in the singles chart by the title track, which also outsold everything in Germany and Holland The album's success came as no surprise, as it included two chart-topping singles, the second 'The Winner Takes It All', a reflective song about the end of a romance which mirrored the emotional situation affecting each member of the group. In early 1981, Benny and Frida became another divorce statistic, adding poignancy to Benny and Björn 's songs. A third track from the album, 'Lay All You Love On Me', made the Top 10 of the UK singles chart, and the song provided another milestone when it topped the US club chart, proving that Abba were both versatile and able to understand many musical styles beside the pure pop which had made them famous. However, with relationships between the couples inevitably strained - Björn had remarried, as would Benny before the end of the year - a concert tour was out of the question, although the quartet reconvened for what turned out to be their final original album, The Visitors, which was accompanied by their final UK Top 3 single to date, 'One Of Us' A few smaller hit singles extracted from the album kept Abba's name in both the chart and the public eye, but by this time, each of the group members was considering future projects outside the Abba umbrella. Both Frida and Agnetha embarked on solo careers, and both enjoyed success, but the quality and appeal of their recordings was simply less attractive to record buyers than had been the case with their Abba output between 1974 and 1982.

As songwriters, Benny and Björn were obviously better to prolong their success, and their most notable achievement during the 1980's was probably 'Chess',the musical which they wrote with famed English lyricist Tim Rice. Based on an actual con-

frontation in Iceland between American and Russian grandmasters of the board game, it included several extracted international hit singles, and spawned a big selling album released in 1984.

The story of Abba as a performing group is almost certainly over, yet the group's immense popularity has remained, largely due to the timeless quality of the recordings they made during their glory years. 'Gold', which has been digitally mastered by Michael 'Micke' Tretow, who engineered the original recordings, brings together for the first time on a single album all Abba's most popular hits, and will undoubtedly provoke instant nostalgia among millions of the group's fans all over the world. As their press officer at the time of that historic success at the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton, it seemed to me most unlikely that Abba would be remembered the following year, but time has proved that Agnetha, Björn , Benny & Frida – ABBA – have outlived even their own expectations. 'Gold' is a magnificent reminder of an era when four young artists from Scandinavia were the biggest group in the world for a number of years, and it is a pleasure for me to remember their achievements, just as it will be for the millions who hear these classics of popular music in the 1990's, almost 20 years after the quartet first emerged on the world stage, and a growing number of new fans who perhaps cannot recall at first hand Abba's initial Eurovision triumph, but who can recognise timeless popular music when they hear it. Enjoy...

John Tobler 1992.

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